

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SAIGON 13219 151200Z

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ACTION SS-30

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R 150910Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9536

S E C R E T SAIGON 13219

EXDIS

FOL SENT ACTION SAIGON FROM DANANG OCT 14

QTE S E C R E T DANANG 0487

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, VS

SUBJECT: COURTESY CALL ON MARINE DIVISION COMMANDER

1. OCT 12 CALLED ON BG BUI THE LAN, COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS AND COMMANDER OF THE MARINE DIVISION.

2. LAN PREDICTED CONTINUED LIGHT TO MODERATE MILITARY ACTIVITY IN HIS AREA OF OPERATION IN NORTHERN MR-1. THROUGHOUT THE RAINY SEASON. HE BELIEVES A MAJOR ALL-OUT NVA/VC OFFENSIVE IS PROBABLE EARLY IN 1975. HE THINKS THAT THE NVA/VC WILL ATTEMPT TO STIMULATE A POPULAR UPRISING AGAINST THE GVN AT THE SAME TIME.

3. LAN SAID THAT CURRENT SEVERE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS WERE VERY SERIOUSLY AFFECTING THE MORALE OF RVNAF. HIS OWN MARINE DIVISION WAS AFFECTED BUT LESS SO THEN OTHER ELEMENTS OF RVNAF "BECAUSE WE'RE ALL VOLUNTEERS". HE SAID THAT TROOPS UNDER HIS COMMAND ARE STILL LIGHTING EFFECTIVELY AND "THE ENEMY IS AFRAID OF US".

4. LAN NOTED THAT THE NVA/VC FORCES CURRENTLY IN MR-1 HAVE GREATER MOBILITY AND FIREPOWER THAN EVER BEFORE. HE BELIEVES THAT THEY

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 SAIGON 13219 151200Z

HAVE THE CAPABILITY OF CUTTING HIGHWAY ONE IN THE VICINITY OF

PHU LOC (JUST NORTH OF HAI VAN PASS) AT VIRTUALLY ANY TIME THAT THEY CHOOSE. HE DOES NOT BELIEVE THE ARVN 1ST DIVISION WILL BE ABLE TO CONTROL KEY HIGHGROUND WEST OF ROUTE ONE. "IT IS UNDERSTRENGTH AND HAS LEADERSHIP AND MORALE PROBLEMS." IF THE NVA/VC DECIDED TO CUT THE HIGHWAY LAN BELIEVES THAT THEY COULD PROBABLY HOLD THE CUT FOR A PROTRACTED PERIOD.

5. LAN SAID THAT HE BELIEVED THE NVA/VC WOULD PROBABLY BE ABLE TO CONTINUE

TO KEEP PHU BAI AIRBASE UNDER 85MM ARTILLERY FIRE DUE TO THE WEAKNESS OF THE ARVN 1ST DIVISION (WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IT IS TO ELIMINATE THAT THREAT).HE BELIEVES THAT THE NVA/VC PRIMARY

OBJECTIVE AT PHU LAI IS TO FRIGHTEN THE PEOPLE OF V UE WHO HAVE

COME TO DEPEND ON IT AS AN IMPORTANT LINK WITH THE REST OF VIETNAM. BY CLOSING PHU BAI THEY ALSO OF COURSE, PLACE STRAIN ON THE GVN LOGISTIC SYSTEM NORTH OF HAI VAN PASS BUT THIS IS A SECONDARY OBJECTIVE IN LAN'S MIND.

6. LAN BELIEVES THAT THE NVA/VC WILL MOST LIKELY CONCENTRATE ON CONTROLLING KEY HIGH GROUND WEST OF ROUTE ONE IN THE PHU LOC AREA BUT WILL NOT NOW MOVE TROOPS DOWN INTO THE LOW LANDS TO ATTEMPT A PERMANENT CUT OF THE HIGHWAY. "THE TIME IS NOT RIGHT." ATTACKS ON THE HIGHWAY WILL BE MADE BY SAPPERS AND PERHAPS BY ABFS. THE GVN LOGISTIC SYSTEM NORTH OF HAI VAN PASS WILL BE STRAINED BUT WILL CONTINUE TO FUNCTION ADEQUATELY.

7. ACCORDING TO LAN'S ANALYSIS THE NVA/VC DO NOT NOW HAVE ENOUGH FORCE IN MR-1 TO LAUNCH AN ALL OUT OFFENSIVE. THEY WILL REQUIRE ADDITIONAL DIVISIONS FROM NORTH VIETNAM. "IN ORDER TO KNOW WHEN AN ALL OUT OFFENSIVE IS COMING WE HAVE TO HAVE INTELLIGENCE ABOUT TROOP MOVEMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM."

8. LAN RATES THE COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS OF NVA/VC FORCES PRESENTLY IN NORTHERN MR-1 AS BEING 60 TO 70 PERCENT AS EFFECTIVE AS THE
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 SAIGON 13219 151200Z

FORCES HE FACED IN THE OFFENSIVE OF 1972. "MANY OF THEIR BEST OFFICERS AND NONCOMS WERE KILLED IN 1972. THEIR DISCIPLINE IS NOT AS GOOD AS IT USED TO BE AND THEY APPEAR TO HAVE SOME MORALE PROBLEMS."

FRANCIS UNQTE MARTIN

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NNN

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